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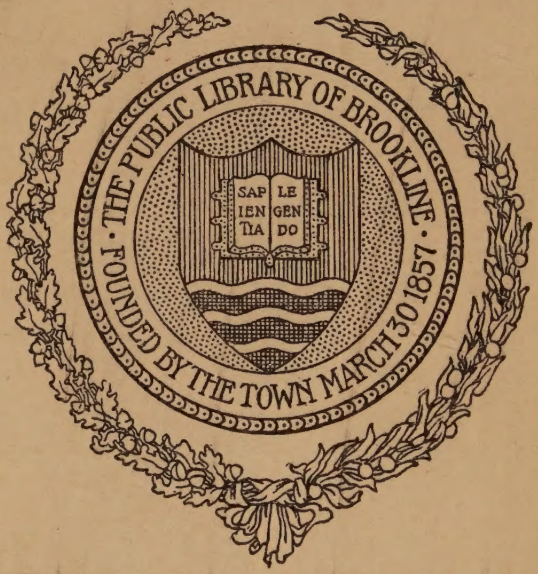

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THE SEVENTH HILL

Also by

ROBERT HILLYER

Sonnets and Other Lyrics
1917

The Five Books of Youth
1920

Alchemy: A Symphonic Poem
1920

The Hills Give Promise
1923

The Coming Forth by Day
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THE SEVENTH HILL

BY

ROBERT HILLYER

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TO DOROTHY

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BOOK FOUR · PROTHALAMION

BOOK ONE
MEDITATIONS

I

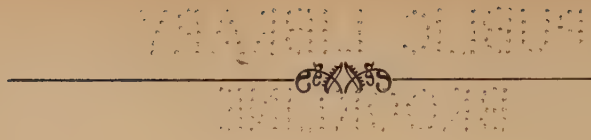
The farthest country is Tierra del Fuego,
That is the bleakest and the loneliest land;
There are the echoing mountains of felspar,
And salt winds walking the empty sand.

This country remembers the birth of the moon
From a rocky rib of the young earth's side;
It heard the white-hot mountains bellow
Against the march of the first flood tide.

I lifted a shell by the glass-green breakers
And heard what no man has heard before,
The whisper of steam in the hot fern forest
And slow feet crunching the ocean floor.

I saw the slanted flash of a seagull
When a sheaf of light poured over the clouds,
I heard the wind in the stiff dune grasses,
But I saw no sail and I heard no shrouds.

To a promontory of Tierra del Fuego
I climbed at noon and stretched my hand
Toward another country, remoter and bleaker.



II

When I say For Ever I think of the temple of Zeus,
The broken drums of the columns buried in grass;
Marble avails not, words are of little use,
It is longer than miles from Olympia to Patras.

For Ever is marble, For Ever is white and tall,
But the road I follow ends in a tangle of weeds
Where lie the drums of the columns, the stones of the wall,
Broken letters of a word that no man reads.

III

The skirts of the careless wind have thrown
The sand in pattern of herring-bone.
Up from the ocean to the skies
Egyptward the phœnix flies.
Is it far away, bird of flame,
Is it far away, eyes of stone?
You'll lose your sight, you'll lose your name
Before the homeward journey is done.
Will you and the sun sail alone,
Bird of flame and boat of the sun?
Your eyes will fall to the yellow beach
And the tide will bear them out of reach;
The green tide will look at the sky
Through the fiery glaze of a phœnix eye.
Will the shrines of Egypt still be kind
When the wings are salty, the eyes blind?
And what is sight to the dazzling sun
Who puts the stars out one by one?

Who is the young man that would dare
Fling his questions up the air
To the lord of fire who cruises there!
Forgive, bright phœnix, Egypt-bound,
That silence make so small a sound;

And you, my earth of sky and sea,
Beg with adroit humility
Forgiveness of your brother stars,
Jupiter, Mercury, and Mars,
That you, a sandy sparkle blown
Into design of herring-bone
As the skirts of the wind go brushing by,
Fly Egyptward, and think you fly
With the sun, immortal and alone.

IV

This pathway marked No Thoroughfare
Is obviously barred,
But vulgar people love to stare
In someone else's yard.

It is not reverent but rude
To spy beyond the bounds
Like raw plebeians who intrude
Upon patrician grounds

And bribe the servants to undo
The door a little crack—
A burglar's glimpse, a keyhole view,
Behind the Master's back.

A scandal, so it seems to me,
The way they force the doors
To trespass on the privacy
Of their superiors.

How much more fitting to await
The summons to attend,
Ride proudly through the open gate
And enter as a friend.

V

Happy art thou, my phantom saint,
As the quill draws out the whorls of paint
And the letter blossoms into a rose;
Word by word the slow book grows.

Out of the window I see the stream
Cleave the hill with a broken gleam.
The autumn sunset burns to a scar
And the sky is healed with a single star.

Around thee the pools of shadow blend,
Fingers loosen and labours end.
The ink has dried on the supple quill
And sunset burned out over the hill.

Thou hast left thy work, O my phantom saint,
Unfinished, but not one letter faint.
The spirit blossoms into a rose,
And word by word the slow book grows.

VI

As I was faring through a wood
Bewildered as I was,
I came upon a wayside rood
That glistered clear as glass.

Like glass in noontide sun, the rays
Stood out in thorny light
So dazzling to my darkened gaze
I could not see aright.

Why is the wonder wrought for me
So lost and so alone?
I knelt beneath the fiery tree
Upon a floor of stone.

Why for a man of little faith
This wonder for a saint?
A roof shut out the sky; beneath
The gloaming wood grew faint.

Low voices murmured and I heard
Bells far away and soft,
The lights around the rood were stirred
By smoke that swirled aloft.

The Host and the angelic Cup
Shone forth with forkëd flame,
But no priest came to lift them up
Or call them by their Name.

And there were others in that place
Who knelt or moved about,
And I beheld on every face
The secret smile of doubt.

And three with leaden measures crept
To prove the things of gold,
And one in robes of purple slept
Twitching as if with cold.

And as I watched, I saw a rout
Of beasts that trampled down
The three with rules who crept about,
The one who had a crown.

Oxen there were, and kine, and sheep,
That trampled down the men;
I shall not see unless in sleep
The like of that again.

But at the altar, pair by pair,
They bent, and so a yoke
Was placed upon them, made of air
Yet heavier than oak.

And all their bleating din grew still.
They stood in meek array
As if they waited there until
The break of Judgment Day.

Sanctus! the voice was like a star
Singing in silver curve.
A bell rang soft and very far
Yet rang through every nerve.

Sanctus! now farther and forlorn,
As if none understood.
The Host by hand unseen was borne
In glory to the rood.

Three times the bell rang out; it seemed
Each tinkle of the sound
Turned to a silent light that gleamed
Upon a holy ground.

The sanctus died upon my ear
And wakened on my eye
To be a star set high and clear
Amid a frightened sky.

The walls, the rood, the altar waned,
The chapel was no more;
Only the patient beasts remained
Where they had been before.

And where the altar once had stood
Came forth a maid who smiled;
And from the waning of the rood
Was born a laughing child.

"Mother," he said, "the day has come!"
Her face grew dark with pain.
"Mother, do thou and I go home,"
And she was healed again.

Then spread the angel of the east
Her wings of fire and gold.
Then vanished maid and child and beast,
And all the wood grew cold.

As cold as on a ruined hearth
The ashes of content;
As cold as the lost heart of earth
Whose inner warmth is spent.

As cold as he who saw the sight
And went upon his way
Denying, in the depth of night,
That he had seen the day.

VII

The curtains draw across the brain
And in that lighted house of mirth,
Secure from all the eyes of earth,
Our troupe of dreams come out again.

Folly has donned the sage's mask,
Wisdom appears the Knave of Hearts,
Yet in these topsy-turvy parts
They seem as real as one could ask;

As real as when they change their rôles
To be themselves and haunt the dream
Where for some hours of day they seem
Important to our sleeping souls.

VIII

All day from smoky roofs the snow
Has thudded to the yards below
And melted, till at evening
The warmth and wet of early spring
Hang in a haze where every sound
Comes muffled as from underground,
And every faint sensation, fraught
With the finality of thought,
Entices from their dark chambers
Other days that the mind remembers
Because they also had looked back
Where memory itself goes black.

The rift in winter brings to pass
A wilder glory than green grass,
An ampler light than ever came
On blossoms trembling into flame.
The passersby with open coats
Rise huge and sudden like the boats
Which loom portentous on the lee
Through early morning fog at sea;
And on the lawn where snow grows thin
Sparrows raise an increasing din
In crazy revelry of noise
Like congresses of yelling boys;

Yet waning in the rear, refined
By space, their clamour brings to mind
The April evening when first
On unaccustomed hearing burst
The voice of bluebirds singing plain:
We have come back! come back again!

I know it now, on every hand
Murmurs the thawing meadowland;
I smell the maple sap, I feel
The uncertain breeze advance and wheel;
Almost without persuasion see
The blue wood close in after me,
Conspiring dimly, tree by tree;
As mated over empty miles
One clear bell rings, one clear star smiles.

In the grim city I have known
The glow has melted bricks and stone,
For this is the promise never kept
By spring herself. We that slept
Wake for one moment longer than
The generations known to man;
Beyond our syllable find speech,
Beyond our halted breathing reach

Toward the all-comprehending air,
And, fearing no denial, share
The undiminished draught which gives
Life manifold to all that lives.
Nor will the familiar dead be still;
They hasten toward me down the hill.
Though memory on living ears
Make not a sound, each phantom hears
His name, as though the thought had spun
A summons down oblivion.
They come whose spring is never past,
Langland and Chaucer, friends at last,
Shakspere and Drayton and John Donne,
Sidney and tuneful Campion,
And Herrick, with uplifted nose
Snuffing the air for wine or a rose.
Heroes put on their mail of flesh;
Istar's beloved, Gilgamesh;
Achilles, the great surly boy
Who slumbers well by windy Troy;
And he who snatched his father's crown
To bring the fire of Heaven down.
And queens, coy at a random smile,
Rise from their turquoise tombs a while,
Sweet Nefertiti of the Nile,

And those twin stars of every sky
Without whose names romance would die:
Blithe Helena who slew for love
And Cleopatra slain for love;
And virgin still to lust or death,
Incomparable Elizabeth.
So they come on without an end,
The long dead and the last year's friend,
Intangible as melody
Or the new wind rising from the sea.
They come in a thought, in a thought go by,
Because it is spring and I too shall die,
Because it is spring and they too were young,
And the songs we would hear were never sung.

O changeless city of my pain,
I know they pass and you remain;
I know that evening thaws not twice
Your thews of stone, your heart of ice,
And yet remember, though in vain,
How once you harboured Paradise.

IX

The stars came, but her Love came never,
And standing there on the bank of the river,
" Come back! " she said to the waves of the river,
But they hurried away and they came back never.
" You come not back to the land of my lover,"
She said to the hurrying waves of the river,
" Then will I go with you, waves of the river,
To oceans far from the land of my lover."
Under the starlight the girl and the river
Hurry away and they come back never.

X

Fading moon,
You will drag the stars with you;
The bride is neglected.
Soon on the rim of the sea
The elected of him who was starry with pride
Will yield unto darkness.
She who was fairest,
As white as the sea-foam she lies on,
Wrapped in the rarest veil woven
By girls in the undersea forest,
Watches the fading horizon,
Gives her salt tears to the salt of the sea,
And yields unto darkness.
Dark is a strange, slow lover
With hands that fumble unknowing;
Dark is a slow tide flowing between two days.

The boy will discover
Her face with vainglorious rays,
And shaking his wild bright hair to the morning
Will cry her to scorn.
He will leap up the stairs of the morning,
Forget her with laughter.

Fading moon, as you set
You have dragged the stars with you.
Soon after comes darkness.

XI

O Mariners of the Sun, you have reached your port!
Under the Mountain of Twilight how still the mooring!
The golden boat grows dim, and you disembark.
In the taverns of nether earth may you meet rare sport,
And loves madder than ours if no more enduring,
And a night sweeter than our night though as short.
O Mariners, in that city of the dark
Forget not the greetings I gave you for my friend:
Tell her how sometimes I would rush out to find her,
And sometimes I bide unmoved, but for ever send
Love, and for ever love. And again remind her
That soon or late I will join her in the end.

XII

May the castle lie in slumber
For another thousand years,
Beldame fallen by her spindle,
Sentries full-length by their spears.
Sleeping hands no toil shall cumber,
Sleeping hearts no love shall kindle,
Sleeping eyes are void of tears.

May the blue flame in the hallways
Burn like tapers by the dead,
May no clarion of duty
Rouse the old King from his bed.
And the Princess, may she always
Lie in peace, for Sleeping Beauty
Blossoms only to be shed.

In my vision I had bound her
To my fate, a mortal wife
Wakened from a sleep immortal
By the urgent kiss of life.
But I left her as I found her
And above the southern portal
This I lettered with my knife:

"Loves there are that feast in giving;
Slumber still—my love was such;
Bonds that strengthen as they sever,
Lips that pause and will not touch.
Sleep, Beloved, safe from living;
Sleep, Beloved, safe for ever
From the one who loved too much."

XIII

" Never think of me, never remember,"
She was singing in her chamber
High in the attic under the eaves
Where dusty windows are screened with leaves.

" Never think of me, never remember,"
She was singing in her chamber,
She did not hear the knocker clang
Or a voice below that also sang.

Her wheel whirred on, the flax spun out
A cobweb strand as thin as doubt,
The green leaves tapped on the window pane,
And someone knocked and knocked again.

She did not hear the knocker clang
Or the voice below that also sang:
" Not many years—and the heart still young
Weaves new words for the willing tongue.

" Not many years have passed, and the heart
Still young is led to where thou art
By a slender strand of flaxen hair,
By a strand of song as thin as air."

The wheel whirred on, and grain by grain
The grey dust filmed the window pane;
She did not hear him when he knocked
For the leaves were thick and the windows locked.

She did not hear, now faint and far
Like music heard through doors ajar:
" Not many years have passed, are past,
But dust will stifle the heart at last."

High in the attic under the eaves
The dusty windows are screened with leaves.
" Never think of me, never remember,"
She was singing in her chamber.

XIV

Lady to whom all men must come at last
Whether with wine-wet lips or starveling wail,
Behold in me a pilgrim, though I cast
No fardel down, nor weep undone and pale
As would a holy man; I come not frail
But strong of sinew with my bow still bent,
My arrow poised, my body bright as mail,
For I am weary and would lie content.

I would not sue thee ragged and aghast
But as a prince to purchase thine avail.
Behold, I bring with me a wealth so vast
That seeking it, Phœnician keels might sail
For ever over gloaming waves, and fail.
All thine, if in that nether continent
Grey-cliffed with wanhope, thou canst hear my hail,
For I am weary and would lie content.

Here then I give thee back the child thou wast,
Shut so long in my heart as in a gaol;
Lo, tiptoe on the threshold of the past
She hears again the cloudy nightingale
And sees me glimmer toward her down the dale

And follows me, love with her lover blent;—
Ah, thou rememberest? but do not quail,
For I am weary and would lie content.

Once more, O Lady, thou hast heard the tale,
The gift of days once more received and spent;
Fill thou with wine of sleep this darker grail,
For I am weary and would lie content.

BOOK TWO

SONNETS

I

With simple words to say a simple thing
He would have charmed away your year of woe,
But when he spoke it was a violin string
Which snapped to the full urging of the bow.
Or was it you who shut your ears, and so
Denied old beauties that are contraband;
To whom the old spirit sang in vain, although
You pry the flesh of dead kings from the sand?

With silent lips now and with empty hand
He walks among you vulnerable to scorn,
Yet thinking of the twilight in that land
And listening for his comrade's evening horn,
And wondering of that day when he was born
To write these words you will not understand.

II

Strong wills there are that dare the worst, and break;
Strong minds that in a mortal season ponder
Immortal wisdom; willing feet that wander
Forbidden ways; pure spirits that forsake
The city's custom, and beside the lake
Of loneliness give heed; and those who squander
Their legacy of faith, that here, not yonder,
Life's fruit, though green, fall from the bough they shake.

Destiny on her pediment still smiles.
She knows the doors they knock at, and the key
Lies in her hands. She triumphs in withholding
Her secret, though in pity she beguiles
Their senses with a dream of earth and sea
That Truth be unsuspected, though enfolding.

III

And too much thought, my friend, has taken me far
From the moorlands where my shadow and I alone
Marched up the wind, then well content to own
No more than each his ghostly avatar.
Motion goes by me now; I sit in stone
Rigid with meditation, where there are
No winds or moors, and like a fallen spar
My shadow lies before me overthrown.

Not free from thought so to be gay once more
Nor free from memory so to be wise,
I close my ears to music, and my eyes
To faces that I might have loved before.
While shadow murmurs: Come, my fellow dancer!
I sit in stone, neither to move nor answer.

IV

Always more riches, more enjoyment, more
Of everything the world can briefly give,
Though through your avid hands as through a sieve
Beauties unnumbered and unnoticed pour.
You chase the wind, but you are fugitive
From the great quiet at the whirlwind's core,
And spendthrift of life's measurable store
You have not purchased the mere right to live.

There is a vacant seat beside me here
Where you may rest and watch the season change;
Form, colour, tone, mysterious or clear,
In swift variety though never strange,
Where if one beauty wholly be revealed
Life will have yielded all she has to yield.

V

Quieter than the shadow of a moth
Over the orange sands of afternoon,
Quieter than the twilight on the dune
Or the soft toe-dance of the tidal froth
There passed thy swift, pale body, and as soon
As thou wert come, the lady Ashtaroth
Covered her crescent with a purple cloth,
Seeing thy hands more silver than her moon.

But there were dead men reaching from the sea,
And phantom voices calling from the sand;
And all this living blood that cried for thee
Stayed not thy flight to the dim hemlock land
Where thou hast vanished, leaving in this place
Only thin dust that loved thy passing face.

VI

From the blue air where you have wandered free
I call you home to slumber and forget;
Down the white drift of stars I cast my net
And draw you inward from the breathing sea.
The mist is rising where the sun has set,
The laden cobweb sags from tree to tree;
All have gone home now, Child, but you and me;—
Wherefore this terror and this wan regret?

I could not give you life, I could but lend,
Yet lest the night be long I kindle now
Flame after flame around you to defend
Your quiet heart and your untroubled brow,
And I have sealed your silence with a vow:
Love shall return to wake you in the end.

VII

He who in spring's rebirth has put his trust
Now answers not to April or to May,
Nor sees the moon-white apple blossom sway,
Nor breathes its sweetness on the evening gust.
He who was first to climb the height of day
Lies full-length in the valley of the dust;
His sword sleeps in his hand, and it is rust;
His heart sleeps in his breast, and it is clay.

Brother, so mute among the fallen years,
We come at dayspring to your living tomb
That is the green earth, and we shed no tears,
Knowing that if you wander otherwhere
Soon will you give us gracious welcome there,
And if you perished, then we share your doom.

VIII

The great desire that urged these trees so high
Runs thinly in your veins tonight; you hear
Their language with an unaccustomed ear
And guess at alien conspiracy.
So in mid-June one sapling will turn sere
Though it has drunk its share of wind and sky,
And in its leaves November voices cry
Long months before the wilting of the year.

Though in fair fields your life was planted firm,
Some seedling ill grew with you from the start
And at your roots thought like a busy worm
Ticked inward slowly, till you stood apart
When youth had run but half its lovely term,
And heard the spring with autumn in your heart.

IX

As one who bears beneath his neighbour's roof
Some thrust that staggers his unready wit
And brooding through the night on such reproof
Too late conceives the apt reply to it,
So all our life is but an afterthought,
A puzzle solved long past the time of need,
And tardy wisdom that one failure bought
Finds no occasion to be used in deed.

Fate harries us; we answer not a word,
Or answering too late, we waste our breath;
Not even a belated quip is heard
From those who bore the final taunt of death;
And thus the Jester parries all retort:
His jest eternal, and our lives so short.

BOOK THREE
PASTORALS

I

Ponder the tone; the broken theme
Sounds once for us, and not for long.
It is easy to forget a dream
However exquisite it seem,
It is easy to forget a song.

The Master does but improvise,
The final music is not yet;
But when it shakes eternal skies
I would not have you quite forget
The music of the mortal dream
We shared in joy, though not for long.
Ponder the tone, the broken theme,
It is easy to forget a song.

II

You can not hear me, for my lute
Is old; the silver strings
Are almost mute
While rings
The blare of horn and clarion.
But song so noisily begun
Ends with the players' breath;
When they are done
And death
Scatters the final blast they dinned,
The lute still whispers in the wind.

III

August afternoon in a drowse,
No leaf moving on the boughs,
No ripple moving on the pool
Nor a thought in the mind of summer's fool
Who treads the shadow of delight;
Morning, afternoon, and night,
He treads the shadow of delight.

Tell him how the blackbirds flew
To form their flocks, two by two;
Warn him with the goldenrod
And brown seeds from the lily pod.
Stir the air with solemn warning
Afternoon and night and morning,
Till he heed your autumn warning.

Summer's fool will never heed
Though the whole earth go to seed.
Death will catch him unaware
With the vine leaves in his hair.
Leave him to his dream, for soon
Morning, night, or afternoon,
He will waken—all too soon!

IV

Piping Anne and husky Paul
Once they swelled our madrigal,
She watched him and he watched her,
Always out of tune they were.
Yet from two discords may be
Love's most tuneful harmony;
Such a music they have wrought,
(they have wrought)
As to set our skill at naught.

Let the nightingale in vain
Lift his amorous refrain,
Let the dying reedy swan
Cease her prothalamion.
They are sunk in such a bliss
Deep as old Atlantic is.
End our song and come away
(come away)
Music hath no more to say.

V

Full length on the hills of heaven
Daphnis lay at half past seven;
Heaven indeed it was to share
Morning with so loved, so fair,
As the one beside him there.

Quarter before eight, a sorry
Daphnis dwelt in Purgatory,
Too undone to think or say
How a morning of mid-May
Had become the Judgment Day.

Eight o'clock, and Daphnis made his
Penitential way to Hades,
Pricked with all the fiery spears
Of his own accusing fears
And the memory of her tears.

So in half an hour returning
From his bliss and from his burning,
Nothing left to lose or win;
Daphnis thought he'd best begin
To be born again in sin.

VI

Paris was the comeliest man
That ever filched a wife,
But for each time he kissed his love
A Trojan lost his life.

Helen was the fairest lady
That ever bore the name,
But when she gave her to her love
All Troy burst into flame.

O I have died a Trojan's death
For every smallest joy.
Is it not time, my very love,
To fire the walls of Troy?

VII

So ghostly then the girl came in
I never saw the turnstile twist
Down where the orchard trees begin
Lost in a reverie of mist.

And in the windless hour between
The last of daylight and the night,
When fields give up their ebbing green
And two bats interweave their flight,

I saw the turnstile glimmer pale
Just where the orchard trees begin,
But watching was of no avail,
Invisibly the girl came in.

I took one deep breath of the air
And lifted up my heavy heart;
It was not I who trembled there
But my immortal counterpart.

I knew that she had come again
Up from the orchard through the stile,
Without a sign to tell me when,
Though I was watching all the while.

VIII

Do not demur, for I am not to blame;
I am no geometrical design
That you can surely say: there is a line,
An angle, there—I am not twice the same.

There was a summer once, how long ago
I can not think . . . . Just yesterday? but I
Am centuries removed from what I know
Of yesterday, and so is the dark sky.

Follow the blowing leaves if you would see
The map of all my travels; perhaps then
If the same wind should scatter you and me
Just for an instant we might meet again.

IX

Lost-in-the-forest, do not think
I wilfully led you to the brink
Of this dark-flowing river.

For I had heard of you as one;
But when at last I looked upon
Your face, I saw an army.

I stumbled, and I lost the way—
Ten years ago? or yesterday?
That too I have forgotten.

Do not blame me. Do not weep.
The shepherd wanders with his sheep.
Lie down and sleep.

X

Slender Naiad of stone
My kiss on your mouth
Smote me with cold.
Wake quickly! the dream we have known
Is a silver swan flying
Away to the south.
You have chilled all the air with your mouth,
And the garden is dying.

XI

Now on the idle pond
Slowly the fallen leaf
Drifts with its double.

Crescent from prow to poop,
Curving with curves of gold,
Galley of silence.

How have our pomps decayed!
Frail is the royal barge,
Autumn the cargo.

XII

A sudden chime of bluejay notes
Reminding of the spring,
Because in autumn there is also twilight,
Echo of departed music.

We shiver in our winter coats—
Too much remembering;

The street lamp shivers in the pond,
And the tall trees beyond.

XIII

I watched the pond without lifting my eyes;
Shadow of leaves on shadow skies;
Scarves of colour twining through haze
And a bright bird flying with wings ablaze;
A bird flying over, the day in flight,
And I watched him pass without lifting my eyes.
It was enough, the shadow of delight,
The shadow of a bird over shadow skies.

The first white star unbound her hair;
The water trembled and she was there
Setting her foot on the darkening mirror
While round her the trees of night leaned nearer;
They gathering dark, she gathering light,
And I watched the pond without lifting my eyes;
It was enough, the shadow of night,
The shadow of a star in the shadow skies.

XIV

So soft in the hemlock wood
The phœnix sang his lullaby,
Shepherds drowsed where they stood,
Slumber felled each passerby,
And lovers at their first caress
Slept in virgin loneliness.

Not for mortal eye to see
Naked life arise from embers;
Only the dark hemlock tree
Evergreen itself, remembers
How the Word came into being,
No man hearing, no man seeing.

From the taut bow of sleep
Shoots the phœnix toward the day,
Shepherds wake and call their sheep,
Wanderers go on their way.
Unaware how death went by,
Lovers under the hemlocks lie.

XV

Pan of the Crossroads, take the song
Thy pilgrim offers at the shrine.
It is the memory of one
Who at the rising of the sun
Went down the other road from mine.
It is a memory held too long;
Take thou the memory with the song.

XVI

The fireflies wink and glow,
The night is on the march,
The cricket clacks his castanets
And the moon hangs in the larch.
I will take my violin
And a few themes I will play:
Pizzicati for the fireflies,
Harmonics for the moonlight,
And a chord for the smell of hay.

I will play but a few bars
And when the moon has set
I will listen to the stars.

XVII

The grapes are ripe, the frost is near,
The cricket sounds a rusty note,
And the bluebird at the close of year
Repeats the April song by rote.

Day still is warm, but after dark
Autumn advances leaf by leaf;
And the watchdog with a nervous bark
Halts an imaginary thief.

XVIII

In solemn pause the forest waits
The signal to return;
Within our rotting garden gates
The weeds of autumn burn.

Father to son we held our field
Against the siege of tares,
Knowing our weaker sons would yield
The land no longer theirs.

Knowing how wind and sun and rain
Would fling their green stampedes
Where we who harvested the grain
Lie buried under weeds.

XIX

Let us for ever be at peace
As walls and mountains are,
Or as the ocean storms that cease
When smoother tides would hold a star.
We strove with shadows for so long
We sped our youth so fast,
But now the bell has rung for evensong
And sleep, at last.

How many frolics we have seen
Who now shall frisk no more,
And made pretense of budding green
When autumn ripened at the core.
When wit was wanting words were long
And folly made reply,
Now all our words are but good-night, our song
A lullaby.

BOOK FOUR
PROTHALAMION

I

Lamp of the West, held high aloft
By hand unseen of her whose name
Thou bearest; star when nights are soft
And earth breathes skyward the faint flame
Of pungent green wherein is mingled
Wild cherry's virginal, keen smell;
White Venus, singled
From galaxies to be the guide
Of man and bride,
Take thou our thanks for this thy miracle.

The silver-footed girl once crept
And leaned far out the window ledge
To ponder when they thought she slept,
Thy twin lights at the water's edge;
Until as sparks among the embers
Die, thine image waned away,
But she remembers,
And for the wonder thou hast wrought
A votive thought
She offered on the threshold of the Day.

Yet spring was late this year; the snow
Still hid thee and the garden paled
Beneath a withered moon, as though
For once thy miracle had failed.
Thin oak leaves, ghosts of foliage, clung
Above the new year in the sheath,
And where they hung
Cold shadow hid the snow from day
So that it lay
Round every tree-trunk like a faded wreath.

Now comes thine hour. This marriage eve
Will I alone thy vigil keep,
While maiden-fingered fancies weave
For her upon the loom of sleep
Pictures of the inviolate land
More beautiful than snow, where she
Needs not my hand
To guide her, where she reigns in light
One last, long night,
Untrammeled by our fair conspiracy.

While I, leaning against the wicket,
Watch thy reflection in the pond,
And feel a rhythm through grass and thicket—
My pulse of life, swelling beyond
My veins, beating through space and far
Away where even thy glories blur,
O chosen star!
Yet she eludes us still this hour;
A chaster power
Than ours fills all the universe with her.

But thou and I shall call her back.
Love swoons in those vast periods;
Her feet stray in the heaving black
So far from the more homely gods.
O call her as she comes to me
Tomorrow in the lovers' dawn,
Clean as the sea,
Her gainly body tense with a surmise
That veils her eyes,
Not furtive but most regally withdrawn.

Behind her morning overarches,
Tiers of crimson fire that make
Greener the violent green of larches,
Bluer the calm blue of the lake.
The white swan drifts in mirrored sleep,
The haze is tangled in the rushes;
Clear and deep
A drop of dew rings in the pond
And fields respond
With songs of robins, meadowlarks, and thrushes.

Now, Love, I call thee, and am heard
By none but thee, I speak thy name;
I wed thee with a secret word
In accent quiet as a flame.
I say thou art the one who arrives
For ever, who never shall depart;
Through a thousand lives
When fields are sweetened beneath the sun
Thou art the one
Who wakes the immortal in the mortal heart.

Hasten! the world will crowd us in
With trumpet blast and wedding guest;
The loud solemnities begin,
The caravans come from the west;
The ships of sandalwood that smell
Sweet as the frankincense they bear
Drift on the swell
Like phantoms through the early haze,
Their lamps ablaze,
Their red sails flat against the moveless air.

Hasten! we have not long against
That hour of pomp when we must see
Our rocky garden neatly fenced,
Our love in mild captivity.
Now dawn spreads open like a fan
Of sultry fire, the wet leaves stir;
Girl and man
Pass through the elemental gate,
For spring was late
And now the summer has caught up with her.

At the waterside a tree is growing
Whose blossoms crowd the drifting air,
And of its fruit there is no knowing
Till thou hast tasted of it there.
Its dark leaves in the morning chime
Not of the morning or the night,
But of the time
Between the chaos and the flame
When softly came
The Word that made eternal love's delight.

Eternal the brief joy of flesh,
The finite infinite and whole,
The thwarted body fired afresh
By flames that mount into the soul.
The fruit shall follow the tree-in-flower
With ripe fulfilment after pain;
This is the hour,
The golden rift in time wherefrom
Surely shall come
The song of love-in-death made life again.

But thou, so young; more meet for thee
The birches tossing their green hair!
What blossom crowns the darker tree—
Joy? But thy pain I can not share.
This night I yield thee back to sleep,
This night, the last of loneliness,
I fold thee deep
In peace and ask no more until
Dawn floods the hill,
Not even thy phantom-self for a caress.

And now the curved horizon covers
Love's star that melts away in light.
Lamp of the West, fail not thy lovers
When after another day, the night
Shall lift thee in its arms, and I
In mine shall hold thy counterpart,
Thou in thy sky
And we in ours, until we rest
Beyond the west
Where death lies slain beneath the single heart.

II

The hills turn hugely in their sleep
With sound of grinding rock and soil
While down their granite shoulders leap
The waterbrooks in white turmoil.
The vigil of Good Friday done,
Our second spring ascends the height;
The earth turns southward toward the sun,
And trees which guard the pascal door,
In leaf once more,
Once more are murmurous with strange delight.

For now is the world's Eastertide,
And born that they may die again
Arise from death the gods who died.
Osiris, slender as young grain,
Comes back to Isis; the shy lad
Adonis wakens by the stream;
And Jesus, innocently clad
In samite, walks beneath the trees,
Half ill-at-ease
That Judas and the Cross were but a dream.

And thou art she whom I have seen
Always, but never understood,
In broken shrines festooned with green,
In twilight chapels of the wood;
Or on the hills a shepherdess
Walked with the sun full on her face,
And though her body and her dress
Apparelled her in meek disguise,
I dropped my eyes,
For still I knew the goddess by her pace.

I know thee now in morning light
Though thou are wrought of flesh and blood,
And though the mother of the night
Resumes at dawn her maidenhood;
And though love severed with his knife
The girdle of the million years
And yielded to importunate life
The toll she asks of those who still
Would journey, till
They pass her known and visible frontiers.

The children from beyond the sun
Come bounding down the hillside grass,
And in the joyous rout is one
Who smiles and will not let us pass.
He stands, the fairest of them all,
And in his loveliness I trace
Thy loveliness. His light footfall
Bends not the grass he treads upon;
But he is gone
Before my eyes have feasted on his face.

Let him go back beyond the air;
This spring is ours, it is not his;
Those eager lips would take their share
Of love's yet undiminished kiss.
Fairer than he, as young, as gay,
As much a child, forget all things,
All but this transitory day
Of love, all things but love, and give
Thy fugitive
Delights to me who fly but with thy wings.

In undulant desire we merge,
On tides of light we sport and rest;
We swerve up from the deeper surge
To hover on the trembling crest
Of joy, and when the wave has passed,
Then smooth is the swing to the abyss
Of quietness, where with a last
Eye-darkening smile, we say farewell
Until the spell
Shall be renewed. Forget all things but this.

No grass-blade bends, no shadow stirs;
Love mounted high, slumber is deep;
Deep is the spring beneath the firs,
A sweet and lonely place for sleep.
And waking, we shall cool our flesh
In depths so clear they seem as air;
Twofold in beauty, thou refresh
Thy body in that water, bright
With muted light,
And brighter still for thy reflection there.

While I along the bank shall find
The flowers that opened with the day
Still dew-drenched, and with these entwined
New fronds of fern or darker bay.
Or pausing in a shaft of sun
That strikes across the mottled glade
Watch thee too long, beloved one,
Watch thee with eyes grown big with tears
Because the years
Suddenly spoke and made my heart afraid.

Giver of immortality—
That was thy name within the shrine—
The Mighty Mother, Star of the Sea,
All syllables of love were thine
To wear as lesser women wear
The garlands of their fragile spring;
Why then within my heart this fear
Of time? why then amid the shout
Of life, this doubt
That clouds the new sun like an outspread wing?

We must not to a foe like time
Yield up our present. Take my hand
And up the morning we shall climb
Until the wooded valley land
Lies all beneath us in the drowse
Of love's meridial aftermath;
The trellis of entwining boughs
Trembles in the great joy of green,
But does not screen
The comfortable glimpse of homeward path.

We will not to our ancient foe
Yield up this happiness; it lies
Shielded from sickle and from snow
And all the menace of the skies.
At night I shall watch over thee,
The future safe beneath thy breast,
And after autumn there shall be
Dayspring, when for each other's sake
We shall awake
And follow Love beyond the unknown west.

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